

Dialoguing with Body: A Self Study in Relational Pedagogy through Embodiment and the Therapeutic Relationship

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This article emerges from a self-study (Baird, 2004; Bergum, 2003; Grumet, 1990; Ham & Kane, 2004; Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b; Loughran, 2004) conducted as a requirement for a doctoral class at the University of Ottawa in the Faculty of Education. In this study, I reflected on my embodied experiences and the role of the body in my consulting practice in sport and performance psychology with athletes and dancers. Inspired by the work of Chehayl (2006), I engaged in a narrative analysis (Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002) of my own emerging autobiographic tale, and actively worked towards re-storying my body through a multi voiced dialogue between various “bodies” at play, both mine and those I interacted with. In light of my own personal experiences, combined with my growing understanding of the philosophy of the flesh (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and notions of embodiment in the therapeutic relationship, this study aimed to examine a) how I experienced my body in different domains of daily practice, b) what meaning I derived from these embodied experiences, c) what tensions, congruencies, and divergences existed within my embodied experiences, and d) what implications emerged relating to my consulting practice. Emerging from this self-study is the importance of learning to trust feel, learning to let go, and learning that I/matter. An embodied perspective appears to be an important part of a relational pedagogy and has the potential to facilitate healthy therapeutic relationships when integrated into a reflective, consulting, educational practice. Key Words: Embodiment, Body, Feel, Relational Pedagogy, Therapeutic Relationship, and Self-study

Introduction

“Talk to me” I asked my body. “I am finally listening”
“Dance me this moment” Body replied.

I smiled to myself knowing that perhaps now I finally could. Little did I realize however, that the dance, the moment, this very conversation would take so long to begin unfolding. Like a ballet in multiple acts, or a symphony in three movements, I would experience shifts in my embodied experiences throughout the rest of the academic year. Never however, could I have expected that carrying out a self-study one particular spring, paying attention to me and my body’s shared experiences in this world could be so revealing and ultimately so freeing.

Because the body is a barometer of truth, the body cannot, logically speaking, lie. Or, put differently, when bodies do lie, they give themselves away. (Mullen & Cancienne, 2003, p. 165)

While taking a spring class as part of my doctoral studies at the University of Ottawa in the faculty of education, I had the opportunity to engage in a self study (Baird, 2004; Bergum, 2003; Grumet, 1990; Ham & Kane, 2004; Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b; Loughran, 2004). I embraced this opportunity to reflect on my embodied experiences and the role of the body in my consulting practice in sport and performance psychology with athletes and dancers.

It was a simple enough statement made at the end of class: To know where you're going, you ought to know where you've been. (Chehayl, 2006, p. 105)

We need to see and hear our doings as teachers harbored within the pedagogical presence of our beings... Embodiment, the lived reality of who teachers are, is what opens the possibility of relation between teacher and student... (Bergum, 2003, p. 122)

As a performance psychology consultant, the same rings true. As such, what follows is a collage of narratives, the inner dialogue that ensued, combined with the numerous voices of people I have engaged with in one way or another, be it in person, via e-mail, or through academic published literature, allowing me to gradually "fall back" into my body, thereby re-membering myself whole.

...qualitative interpretation is supported by an 'alternative epistemology' that seeks 'not truth claims' but different meanings... staging voices that belong to the individual student and the collective; and providing open-ended interpretations of the dialogues. (Mullen & Cancienne, 2003, p. 161)

The first thing I remember feeling, I wrote in my journal during the course of this self study, is embarrassed and apologetic. I felt inside like I needed to apologize for so many things about my body...

As a professionally trained ballet dancer and teacher, I have always been interested in the body in motion. Yet my own performing career would prove to be relatively short lived due to a back injury resulting from a car accident. I went back to dance, though never quite the same, having lost my confidence somewhere along the way. However the real injury results from the heavy burden I carry with me everyday in the form of body image and weight issues, the more or less invisible scars that have afflicted my body, mind, and spirit for most of my life since adolescence.

In the all too real world of dance, and especially ballet, weight is no laughing matter... There are, in fact, few other professions – only fashion,

entertainment and some sports come readily to mind – where pounds, or a lack thereof, can be determinants of success. (Looseleaf, 2007, para. 1 & 2)

These scars have led to cycles of obsessive exercising, disordered eating, yoyo dieting, and an overall disconnect between the way I experience my mind and body, trying to rule with one, while making an enemy of the other. In recent years, I pursued an honors degree in psychology with a minor in kinesiology, exploring the role of performing enhancement workshops on the self-esteem, self-efficacy, and coping skills of pre-professional ballet dancers.

For quite a while, my past experiences haunted me; I fought the ghosts and demons of my memory. Every paper I wrote for my classes extolled the crimes of the institutionalized system... (Chehayl, 2006, p. 109)

By the time I began graduate studies in kinesiology specializing in sport and performance psychology, I retired from a life of teaching and performing in dance, and dedicated myself full time to academic endeavors. My research pertained to the role of feel in the creative process of dancers. Having been a mover all my life, I now ironically lived safely within the narrow confines of my head and explored that which I sought for myself, strictly intellectually.

Long ago, Dewey (1934) argued against the use of dualisms for organizing education and the workforce but lost against powerful political forces. American curriculum theorists... propose that the artificial separation of mind and body, male and female, and thought and feelings has since forged a schooling system that is mostly bifurcated and discriminatory. (Mullen & Cancienne, 2003, p. 157)

The disconnect between mind and body was thus completely severed. I gained 40 pounds over the course of a two year masters, began to experience disabling cycles of PMS alongside of irregular periods, and painful undiagnosed digestive episodes. I intellectually understood that I probably carried with me the all too many losses, stresses, and traumas experienced earlier in my life. It was also clear that my body was desperately trying to speak to me, but it took some time for me to be ready to truly listen.

I remember my mind starting to reflect on this... making links to my car accidents, disordered eating, yoyo dieting, obsessive exercising, overtraining, over stretching, and even to the abuse I experienced at the hand of an ex-boyfriend. I remember making links to my mother, who abuses her own body so often, disrespecting her own Self in the process, time and time again; anorexia, alcoholism, sleep and food deprivation, suicide attempt, cutting herself. I see a pattern. Thoughts then took me to my aunt whose actions took the form of the ultimate self-inflicted body abuse when she drained her own life from her Self. Suicide. I see the

pattern. I now think of all the somatic “symptoms” I have, and have experienced since my adolescence; hormonal imbalances, emotional rollercoaster, PMS, depression, low blood sugar, IBS, etc... and wonder how much of it is my body trying to talk to me, and me not listening. I see a pattern. I have not been shown or taught how to self care, and how to make friends with my body. I have not been modeled how to experience from the body, but rather have been taught to conquer it all with reason, the mind, and logic:

“Why do you keep doing this to me?” Body asked me one day

“I don’t know... If I knew that, maybe I could finally stop and treat you right, with care and respect.”

“I deserve nothing less from you” Body said

“I know... it’s just that... I forget”

“You forget what?” my Body asked of me

“I forget that you matter... that I matter, that I am Matter”

“Yes, you do. And yes, you are” She replied...

Emerging in the findings of my masters’ work (Lussier-Ley, 2006) was the role of *feel*, from a physical embodied perspective, in the creative process of modern dancers. Through the participating dancers’ experiences, I was able to begin re-framing my own. Yet it would take some time: time to read, reflect, move, and share. In the past year, I have returned to the dance classroom and have begun the journey back into my body. But I did not return to ballet, a love of which I still hold, but instead favored Flamenco for its intensely passionate rhythms, its maturity of movement, quality, musicality, and fierce sensuality. Flamenco after all embraces woman, as voluptuous woman, something ballet rarely allowed. Hips and bosoms welcomed as integral parts of the movement, while agility, strength, fluidity and presence allowed me to finally be who I am, no more yet no less, within the dance.

Deep down inside, I keep longing to dance. Both physically and metaphorically, I want to dance for all my life, throughout my life. I want to twirl and float, sway my hips, and stamp my feet. I want to clap my hands, throw my head back, and shake, rattle, and roll these bits of mine we collectively call the body... Today, I took a flamenco dance class, and I have learned this: When we re-member ourselves, it is like waking up to find out that everyday is Christmas. The gift is meant to be celebrated. Celebrate Life. Dance.

Yet, for all these glorious moments, the feeling wasn't sticking, wasn't staying with me for more than a few hours, or at best, a few days. Sooner or later, I would find myself feeling captive to my own fears, sorrow, and unexplained sense of anxiety and worthlessness. I had to commit and engage myself fully in this embodied dialogue:

"Why did I get so fat?" I now asked my body.

"You're not fat. I only got big enough for you to see your pain. Some people simply do the opposite with theirs." Deep inside, I know this is true.

"So tell me something... How much pain are you holding onto right now?" I asked

"How heavy do you FEEL?" She replied

"Like the weight of the world is resting on my chest, shortening my breath, or on my upper back, between my shoulder blades, making me slouch under the extra burden"

"So why do you make me carry it?" Body simply inquired

"Carry what?"

"The pain"

"I don't know. I didn't realize that I was, I guess. I've suspected though... How do I stop imposing on you like this?"

"Well, to begin, start paying attention. Engage yourself in this world, use your entire Being to be, here, present. And see how that FEELS"

"But that doesn't rid us of problems does it, doesn't make the load any lighter, does it?"

"Not yet, but perhaps in time you will not NEED this pain in your life to teach you" Body wisely suggested...

There is such a thing as emotional rubbish; it is produced in the factories of the mind. It consists of pain that has long passed and is no longer useful. It consists of precautions that were important in the past, but that serve no purpose in the present. The warrior has memories too, but he learns how to separate the useful from the unnecessary; he disposes of his emotional rubbish. A companion says: "But that's part of my history. Why should I jettison feelings that marked my very existence?" The warrior smiles, but he does not try to feel things that he no longer feels. He is

changing and he wants his feeling to keep pace with him. (Coelho, 2003, p. 121)

In the past year, I have begun speaking with colleagues about their work and personal experiences and in the process have been able to explore, reflect, and share mine. What a gift this has been. This has led me down the path of embodiment; a holistic, interdisciplinary philosophy and slice of literature dedicated to exploring what it means to be human, in mind and body. A paper written in collaboration with a colleague (Coleman & Lussier-Ley, 2006) proved to be a key catalyst for me towards beginning this exploration.

I found myself in a world of kindred spirits. I sat quietly in the company of people who had learned to dance with a graceful movement I both envied and admired. They were working with compassion and caring, dancing fluidly between the letter of the law. (Chehayl, 2006, p. 109)

The writing of this paper, along with my emerging understanding of self study methodologies, now provided me with the precious gift of time and support towards carrying on this path, systematically exploring where and how my embodied experiences evolved and how they shaped the way in which I practice sport psychology with dancers. As my research interests now pertain to creativity, aesthetics, embodiment, and experiential learning in arts and physical education, putting in the time and reflection towards situating myself as human, mover, body, and practitioner, seemed both an important and necessary step toward my doctoral research work, and a sound, ethical, professional consulting practice.

Some people struggle to get fully into their bodies. (Joannides, as cited in Brody, 2007)

The possibility of being comfortable in my own skin sent a tingly sensation right through me. (Beck, 2007, p. 178)

I therefore paid attention, stopped and listened long enough to finally begin hearing my self clearly. I stopped being so afraid of what I might find out and was willing to attempt suspending judgment of not only my answers, but even my very need for asking the questions;

“I want to know where this sorrow comes from. This low lying pain I so often feel in the bottom of my gut, like I swallowed a rock that now just sits there, weighing me down. It’s like one was set there long ago, and that since then, rocks, pebbles, and boulders alike have built up like a dam, blocking things... I can see it in my mind, this dam of rocks...”

“Makes you think of those HATE, MAD, HURT, and ANGRY rocks you and John talked about doesn’t it?” Body remembered

“Yes!” I responded excitedly

“Well, follow the rocks then. And see where they lead you. I’ll take you there, if you’d like...”

Bodies thus bear the marks of both conscious and unconscious processes. (Krieger, 2005, p. 351)

Emotions are the weather patterns of the body (Millman, 2007)

The embodied therapist and the embodied client enter the room. Two breathing systems interact, two motoric systems come into awareness of each other: a relationship begins in which non-verbal communication plays a very large part. (Boadella, 1997, p. 39)

Turp (2000) tells us that “... bodymind unity implies that physical and verbal phenomena are simply coexisting facets of the one thinking, feeling, imagining embodied whole person” (p. 210). Embodiment is also described as a verb-like noun reflecting an abstract idea, process, and is adamant about viewing the body as actively engaged (Krieger, 2007). Embodiment can therefore be thought of as “a multilevel phenomenon, as it necessarily entails the interplay between bodies, components of bodies, and the world(s) in which the bodies live” (Krieger, 2007 p. 351).

“What is experienced is the blending of taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing that is much more than the sum of its parts... Encouraging attention and development of all the senses, which is the wholeness of embodiment, is not just aesthetically pleasing but vital to developing ability in the quality of relations with others” (Bergum, 2003, p. 124)

Summarizing these ideas, Krieger (2007) suggests that, from an epidemiology perspective, embodiment can best be understood in the following ways:

- a) as a construct, process, and reality, contingent upon bodily experience
- b) as a multi level phenomenon, integrating soma, psyche, and society, within historical and ecological context, and hence an antonym to disembodied genes, minds, and behaviors.
- c) as clue to life histories, hidden and revealed
- d) as reminder of entangled consequences of diverse forms of social inequality

As Merleau-Ponty explained (as cited in Shaw, 2004) “it is through my body that I understand other people” (p. 14). It is thus of critical importance that we, educators and individuals in the helping professions such as counselors and consultants, become sensitive to the way we experience our own bodies, as well as those around us.

As therapists we simply have nowhere else to be but in our bodies, and possess no other view of our work than that viewed through our bodies. We are embodied beings as well as embodied therapists. (Shaw, 2004, p. 17)

Curriculum as relationship alerts us to how we occupy shared, non-linguistic space. The students perhaps intuited what feminist writers have known – that there is, within, untapped ‘wisdom of the body’. (Mullen & Cancienne, 2003, p. 162)

I had to stop thinking only with my mind, and begin feeling my life again from the inside out. I had to move, and feel moved, and not resist feeling the fullness of experiences Life was offering me. And so I awoke, literally and metaphorically, to another day and another way of moving through my day.

Today, we again got up early and this time ran/walked for 4K. This was again quite challenging but I feel good about the effort we put forth. Once home, I engaged in 25 minutes of yoga with a DVD I have, which I quite enjoy.

“Meet the resistance of your mind with the softness of your breath” the DVD reminds me

The contrast between such a high intensity activity followed by a slow, calm, focused activity was really enjoyable and made me particularly aware of my body, my state, and my self-in-space.

“Breathe as if expanding your breath into each cell of your body”

What Shaw (2004) and many others in the literature suggest, is that we understand much of our world, and therefore much of each other, in nonverbal, somatic ways. It is thus critical that we open ourselves to exploring these experiences within our own lives, as they inevitably impact the work we co-create with our clients:

... the client has a story to tell and the way it is told is crucial. But therapy also becomes part of the story, thus a co-constructed narrative evolves between therapist and client. As we must remember, we bring our own story to the therapy. This process, I argue, is an embodied one, and the feelings we experience at the somatic level are important in helping to build the co-created therapeutic narrative. (Shaw, 2004, p. 15)

Because values, interests, and habits are all embodied, the body is rarely a neutral site. (Mullen & Cancienne, 2003, p. 163)

Seeing how important this element of my life experience is to my consulting practices, it was the aim of this study to explore the ways in which my embodied

experiences manifested themselves and to reflect on how these may have influenced the way I work with others in performance enhancement psychology delivery.

When your body, mind and soul are healthy and harmonious, you will bring health and harmony to those around you and health and harmony to the world - not by withdrawing from the world but by being a healthy living organ of the body of humanity. (Iyengar, 1989, p. 12)

“It’s not about me, yet it’s all me. We move in this world together, you and I, and we must learn to understand each other and harmonize ourselves to the world, and to our hopes, dreams, and actions as part of it.”
Body offered to me

“We were never really apart were we, from each other you and I, or from others, are we?”

“Of course not. We are all One, in the most profound way. How we feel, think, and move about this world reacts with everything else. So how you truly feel about yourself, therefore, impacts everything about who we are together in this life.”

Only the psychology that has separated things which in reality belong together holds that scientists and philosophers think while poets and painters follow their feelings. In both, and to the extent in the degree in which they are of comparable rank, there is emotionalized thinking, and there are feelings whose substance consists of appreciated meanings or ideas. (Dewey, 1934, p. 76)

In light of my own personal experiences, combined with my growing understanding of the philosophy of the flesh (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and notions of embodiment in the therapeutic relationship, I set out to study my own embodied experiences in this world, all the while examining its implication on the ways in which I conducted my consultation practice. As such, my study aims were to examine a) how I experienced my body in different domains of daily practice (as student, researcher, dancer, and consultant), b) what meaning I derived from these embodied experiences, c) what tensions, congruencies, and divergences existed within my embodied experiences, and d) what implications emerged relating to my consulting practice.

The self-study approach is personal because of its emphasis on the self, narrative inquiry, and participant research, It is constructivist because it includes elements of unending inquiry, challenging of prejudice and convention, respect for experience, and personal construction of knowledge. And it is collaborative in that it stresses collaboration, community, social construction of knowledge, inclusiveness, and quality. (Baird, 2004)

Like autobiography, education implies our presence in the world. That which we perceive, note, remember, is also that which we learn. (Grumet, 1990, p. 323)

For the sake of this study, I systematically engaged in data collection for one month. This qualitative study entailed regular movement practices (running, cycling, swimming, dancing, yoga, pilates, and weight training), free associative writing, a systematic, retrospective review of all consulting tools used in the past consulting season (field notes, journals, handouts, anonymous feedback forms), and a thorough literature review narrowing in on the embodied nature of the therapeutic relationship.

This relational approach... with its emphasis on enhancing professional practice through rigorous self-exploration within a community of learners, is situated within self-study in teacher education. (Kitchen, 2005b, p. 196)

Proponents of self-study, along with other qualitative researchers, have long recognized the importance of examining our personal and professional experiences in order to become better teachers... (Kitchen, 2005a, p. 18)

As one always teaches the self, it is crucial that each teacher engage in a rigorous self-study process in order to develop greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of education. (Kitchen, 2005a, p. 23)

Inspired by the work of Chehayl (2006), and her paper, *Currere in the margins of my dreams: A poem in many voices*, I engaged in a narrative analysis (Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002) of my own emerging autobiographic tale, and actively worked towards re-storying my body through a multi voiced dialogue between various “bodies” at play, both mine and those I interacted with.

The validity and power of self-study as research therefore lies in large part not merely in the intimacy that the practitioner has with his/her practice, but in the special combination of perspectives that practitioner-researchers are able to bring to bear on the phenomenon of teaching: the intimate knowledge of the participant, and the self critical data collection and analysis abilities of the researcher. (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 128)

In addition to the anticipated data collection through movement practice, journaling, and reflection of professional practice, numerous unique opportunities presented themselves to actively embody this study including fasting and detoxing for a series of unpleasant hospital tests including a colonoscopy, and pleasant though body anxiety provoking events such as a couple of bachelorette parties, a girls’ day at the spa, and an elegant, evening wedding. Together, these experiences provided me with rich opportunities to tune in, and see how I felt, what I thought, and how I wished to re-frame and respond to my body’s language. I realized that I could actually better understand

what my body was trying to tell me, now slowly feeling more fluent in my own, personal and mysterious, body language.

Story Number One: Learning to Trust Feel

My gut led the day, and as such, “we” legs, arms, hands, heart, and soul, followed suit. No choice in the matter, really, because we ARE matter, and One. Where my body called, I followed. Aside from these regular bathroom sprints, I tried to stay calm, and use as little energy as possible. As the day wore on, I found myself experiencing moments of intense physical hunger, lasting maybe an hour to an hour and a half at most. Then it would pass. The psychological hunger, this habit of “needing” or more likely “wanting” to eat was interestingly as challenging to get through as the physical symptoms of hunger. Head aches, dizziness, and low blood sugar trembling, were no harder to fight than were the lunch time, snack time, dinner time social cues we “ingest” all the time. What a lesson indeed! And though I moved very little that day, from an external perspective, I became profoundly aware of how much movement my body is in every moment of every day of my life; my heart beats, my blood flows, my neurons fire and my body digests, produces Life & energy, and expulses that which it does not need. Wow! What a gift I have. What power we “hold”, or borrow while living in this Body at this Moment in time.

“Well, I still feel a lot of movement and activity in my gut. I still feel somewhat fragile, weak, and like my body is out of my control.”

“And how does that feel?” Body invited me to notice

“Scary, vulnerable... probably a bit frustrating too.”

“Why?”

“The first thoughts that popped into my head... I don’t trust my body.... But why in the world wouldn’t I? Where would that come from? Why should I not trust my body? It has served me incredibly well for thirtysome adventurous years already...”

“But why are you still trying to THINK about it? That’s not the only source of information, and in this case, isn’t even the right source of the MATTER”

“Right... I don’t know”

“But I bet you, you feel it”

“Feel what?”

“That moment when you stop trusting your own Self and experiences”

“Yes, I think I do. I think those are often the moments when I second guess myself, and usually pick wrong. It’s like multiple choices, your first answer is usually the right one.”

“Exactly, when you trust, you feel, and when you feel you will trust. So just trust feel”

I find myself breathing in deeply, and hear my stomach grumble. My digestive system is still working it out, moving my inner being into wellness. I trust it. I breath again and thank my body for this experience in cleansing, for this experience of emptiness... and for the realization that feeling empty inside does not have to mean sorrow, fear, or weakness, but rather strength, calm, and peace. Wow... maybe that is why I can’t stand the feeling of hunger, the feeling of emptiness, for it always reminds me of the feeling of loss... But I did not lose anything in the past few days that I, or my body needed, I released eggs that were not fertilized, and waste that was not needed for fuel, and lived to tell the tale... I have learned to feel the difference between physical hunger and psychological hunger. I have made the links between feelings of emptiness, where space is created anew, versus feelings of loss and sorrow, and the need to eat when hunger hits. I can stand to go psychologically hungry now. I know I can feed my soul with Life rather than food.

“Thank you for these lessons...” I say to my body

I hear nothing now but feel a sense of Peace. My stomach has stopped growling, and somehow, I now feel wonderfully joy-full.

Story Number Two: Learning to Let Go

At the end of each of my yoga practices, the yogi says in a honey warm and gentle way namaste. Until today, I did not know what this meant, yet for some reason, this word, its resonance, and the way in which it was stated, came across so powerfully to me ... every time she said this word I found myself moved from somewhere deep inside. A tear or two always somehow seemed to find themselves surfacing. Unsure of where they have come from, feeling so at peace, I just let them be, and let them flow as they will. These few lone tears are not accompanied by any usual and known feelings of sadness, anxiousness, fear, or anger, but feels like a simple and powerful release. I surrender. I let go. That is my realization! I feel that those moments at the end of my yoga practice finally allow me to do that which I have rarely been able to state, let alone do, and let go. Let go of whatever resides in me that is unnecessary to my Being at this moment in

time. Let go. Let go of whatever is captured and blocking the flow of ME within. Let go. Let go of whatever is inhibiting my experience of this moment. Let go... Simple, yet powerful... Namaste has somehow resonated deep within the core of my experience, deep within the “corps” really... within the body of my Being...

“Namaste”

“Balance the stillness of the pose with the movement of your breath”

“Quiet your mind. Be still. FEEL your body” my yoga DVD instructor reminds me

“Bodymind unity implies that physical and verbal phenomena are simply coexisting facets of the one thinking, feeling, imagining and embodied whole person” (Turp, 2000, p210)

Even by merely typing these very words, I catch myself taking in a long and deep inhalation and finally exhale, letting any undue tension in my body flow out along side of my breath. I am starting to finally pay attention.

Story Number Three: Learning that “I matter”

Friday, was a close friend’s bachelorette spa day at Le Nordik. This is the kind of experience I treasure, both in terms of friendship as well as the wellness that comes from a day enjoying Scandinavian Baths. However, I had partially been dreading it for it would mean facing all my University girlfriends in a bathing suit, nakedly vulnerable in a way. As they are all younger, fitter, and thinner than I, I knew I would be the largest of the bunch, and was not comfortable with that, remembering moments in my life when I was a young, beautiful, and fit dancer, the envy of perhaps many others. However, even then, I remember now, I thought myself fat.

“I’ve weighed 50 pounds less and felt fat. I now weigh 50 pounds more, and still feel fat. Clearly it’s not about the weight in and of itself. Rather its’ about how I feel in my own skin...”

I had even thought of various excuses I could come up with to get out of “having” to go, as if this was going to be a torturous experience rather than a beautiful day at the spa amongst friends...

“What is wrong with me?” I asked myself.

“This doesn’t fit with who you are. Just go.” Body moved me on...

So I listened to this inner voice and went, still dreading the various moments of truth awaiting me, navigating awkwardly from change room to showers, to steam rooms and pools. I felt fat. But I also felt pulled to surrender to the experience and allow myself to enjoy it. "I have a right to be here..." I told myself over and over in a half panic moment of fear during our first round in the steam room. "I have a right to be here. I have a right to be here!" My conviction seemed to get stronger and stronger each time I said this to myself... I focused on how blessed a timing this was for the care of my body, seeing as it had been through so much earlier in the week due to the hospital tests. I wanted to give this gift to my body, this gift of wellness, and I wanted to give myself and those I care for the gift of friendship. I eventually grabbed my camera and carried it with me in my bathrobe... The pictures are beautiful and show the joy to be found in enjoying restful moments amongst special friends. Not a fat person is to be found in these pictures, just beautiful smiles all around. Two tears roll down my cheeks as I write this. It feels as if I am giving myself permission to be. A few more roll down as I feel the warmth of these tears trickle down my cheeks. I am being kind to myself, for once, and replacing judgment with Love. It feels freeing and expansive, like I am making space to breath...

Pleasure is a knowledge or feeling of perfection, not only in ourselves, but also in others, for in this way some further perfection is aroused in us. (Leibniz, as cited in Riley, 1972, p. 18)

"Of course they can feel it... You can feel when someone is genuine, real, and comfortable with who they are. You can think of a few people in your life who exude that, can't you?" Body asked

"Yes, I can... They have a very special quality about their presence, because it feels pure, uncluttered, clear, receptive, and empathic"

"They are not busy judging themselves, or judging you for that matter"

"That is a load off!"

"EXACTLY! Imagine how different today would feel if you didn't judge yourself once." I smile at the thought...

"How freeing would that be!"

"So if other people can FEEL how I'm feeling, then how I FEEL about myself will impact everyone I meet, won't it?"

"Family, friends, your clients..." Body responded

In analyzing my own reflections, I am profoundly aware of the impact these ideas have on my professional practice. How I feel within can be read by others, just as I can read so much in my clients' non verbal. Tuning into these embodied issues, cues, and responses, and giving myself permission to be, finally begins un-cluttering myself not only to better experience and enjoy my own life, but also to serve others through genuine, embodied presence.

Many would view their body as a receiving device, which was sensitized to picking up cues from their clients. The 'body as receiver' seems to be a spontaneous passive phenomenon that therapists are tuned into. (Shaw, 2004, p. 19)

Our eyes are for looking at things,
 But they are also for crying
 When we are very happy or very sad.
 Our ears are for listening,
 But so are our hearts.
 Our noses are for smelling food,
 But also the wind and the grass and
 If we try very hard, butterflies.
 Our hands are for feeling,
 But also for hugging and touching so gently.
 Our mouths and tongues are for tasting,
 But also for saying words, like
 "I love you," and
 "Thank You, God. For all of these things."
 (Stepanek, 2001, p. 6)

Embodiment likewise invites considering the stories bodies tell in conjunction with those recounted –or hidden or denied – by individuals. (Krieger, 2005, p. 353)

Though self-study is still considered by many to be on the fringes of valid or relevant qualitative methodologies, I do not feel the need to apologize for such epistemological and methodological choices, feeling rather that such rich, subjectively lived experiences can enhance our understanding of multidimensional, complex, social phenomena like embodiment in the therapeutic relationship. I do however acknowledge that time constraints made this self study shorter than I feel necessary to delve fully into the complexities, tensions, and resonances I encountered. It follows then, that a recommendation for this type of study would be to carry it out over a longer period of time. In addition, time permitting, a self study of this kind could benefit from engaging in dialogue with colleagues in the field of dance, academics, and professional sport psychology delivery, as well as the clients with whom we work, in order to be able to enrich one's personal reflections with that of others.

Any writing and reading of our lives presents us with the challenge that is at the heart of every educational experience: making sense of our lives in the world. Autobiography becomes a medium for both teaching and research because each entry expresses the particular peace its author has made between the individuality of his or her subjectivity and the inter-subjective and public character of meaning (Grumet, 1990, p. 324)

Like my pinot noir, I have been nurtured in the sun and the rain, stomped on, bottled up, left in cool darkness to ferment, and finally allowed to breathe. (Chehayl, 2006, p. 110)

This is where I am at, dancing in the *spaces in between* what I know and what I am discovering. What I do know is that I am getting more comfortable with who I am, regardless of temporal shape and form. I see beauty in the world, and kindness in so many, and for once, I am beginning to feel this from within. As I smile and breathe deeply while writing these last lines, I know in my heart which beats and resonates through *this body I am*, that bringing myself, present, at peace, and uncluttered in relation with others is something I am slowly creating and *fleshing into being*. I now know that the breadth and depth of my Beauty cannot be reduced to a number; be it the number on the scale, the size of my clothes, my body mass index, or even my age. I wear my own skin, from the inside out, and in doing so hopefully free others to do the same. I have no doubt that learning to trust feel, learning to let go, and learning that I/matter, are important lessons that emerged from this self-study. An embodied perspective is thus an important part of a relational pedagogy and has the potential to facilitate healthy therapeutic relationships when integrated into a reflective, consulting, educational practice.

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